

CLAIMS:

1. An access authentication system for authenticating access to a first wireless local area network (W-LAN), the operator of which administers a visitor authentication, authorisation and accounting (VAAA) server, wherein a user requesting visiting access to the first W-LAN, and having a valid cellular mobile account, a portable computing device with a browser and a registration with a second W-LAN operator that administers a home authentication, 5 authorisation and accounting (HAAA) server, conveys to the VAAA server, by user intervention, identity information sufficient to enable said VAAA server to communicate with said HAAA server so as to authenticate the proposed connection; said HAAA issuing a personal identification number (PIN) which is encoded and forwarded to the user's mobile telephone and transferred to the browser to 10 authenticate the requested visiting access to the W-LAN; the cost of such access being billed to the user's cellular mobile account and the requested access being achieved via the user's browser.

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2. A system according to Claim 1 wherein the transfer of the PIN to the browser is effected manually by the user.

3. A system according to Claim 1 wherein the portable computing device is coupled to the mobile telephone and the transfer of the PIN to the browser is effected automatically by means including software supported by the portable computing device.

4. A system according any preceding claim, wherein the PIN issued by the HAAA is encoded and forwarded to the user's mobile telephone by means of a short message service centre.

5. A system according to any preceding claim, wherein the user employs the browser to convey said identity information, via the first W-LAN, to the VAAA.

6. A system according to any preceding claim wherein the PIN is combined with masking information.

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7. A system according to Claim 6 wherein said masking information is randomly derived.

8. A system according to any of claims 1 to 4 inclusive, wherein the user calls the VAAA on the mobile telephone.

9. A system according to Claim 8 wherein the telephone call from said user is routed to the HAAA through a premium rate call unit.

10. 10. An access authentication system substantially as herein described with reference to and/or as shown in the accompanying drawings.